

reTHINK Pink

Written by dreamkatcha. Any related videos, as always, can be found on my YouTube channel.

None of this would have been possible without the fantastic resources generously provided by immensely talented emulator authors, and communities such as Hall of Light, Lemon Amiga, Lemon 64, World of Spectrum, Moby Games, World of Longplays and Recorded Amiga Games. Thank you for your tireless dedication to preserving the history of gaming.

Given the original movie was made in 1963 it's possibly a little known fact for many of us that the Pink Panther character *wasn't* initially part of the cast. Believe it or not, the name relates to a panther-shaped imperfection found at the centre of the 'Pink Panther' diamond, the prized possession of a princess due to visit Switzerland where the film is set.

The premise revolves around French detective, Inspector Jacques Clouseau played by Peters Sellers, who is tasked with tracking down a 'Gentleman Thief' alias 'The Phantom'. Cue fly in the ointment spoke in the wheel: he's an incompetent buffoon and so is easily outwitted by his bete noire and unforeseen accomplices. Hilarity of course ensues... it must do, the movie's listed in IMDb's *comedy* category and they wouldn't tell us fibs, would they?

A degree of artistic license was clearly taken with the 1988 game translation, though some of the themes *do* permeate

the home micro adaptations developed by Hannover based studio, reLINE (also responsible for the ReDOS protection system), and published by Gremlin. Here you play the mute, bipedal puddy tat himself with a view to stealing sufficient valuables to pay for a dream holiday in the 'south', wherever that might be.



Fear not, he has a get rich quick cunning plan, wait for it: by proving his pedigree as a suited and booted aristo-cat he aims to secure a number of jobs working as a butler in the homes of various wealthy individuals, and while they're asleep tiptoe around pilfering their precious ornaments and loose change. I once had a colleague who shared Pink's philosophy towards climbing the social ladder. He was sacked, yet somehow landed on all fours and now works as a finance manager. Funny old world, innit.

What our protagonist didn't factor in was that his employers (all of them) would be chronic somnambulists and require

watchful chaperoning to prevent inopportune awakenings that would lead to you being caught red-handed. It's a multi-tasking-o-phobe's nightmare!

Complicating matters further, you're toiling day and night so naturally, when it's Hammer Time you're completely knackered and ready for a kip yourself. Battling the onset of sleep entails monitoring the alertness level of your avatar (as seen in the GUI) and engaging the alarm clock to invigorate yourself whenever it looks like you're about to visit the land of nod. Obviously it shouldn't be used in the close vicinity of your loaded benefactor if you're to successfully 'redistribute' his wealth.

Mollycoddling the delicate sleeping beauty (The Little Man as seen in the cartoons, though known as Mr Rich here) dictates that you ensure his safe passage as he plods mindlessly between rooms, rather than say, strapping him to a chair, which might have been far easier.



This is accomplished by deploying ramps or trampolines over obstacles such as bearskin rugs or perfectly *flat* mats, shoving him to reverse his direction of travel, or ringing a bell to somehow cause him to walk further into or out of the scene, thereby aligning him with a certain doorway or staircase. Another useful tool at your disposal is the Lemmings style mini-me blockers that can be rooted in place causing your boss to switch direction without you having to stick around to execute the manoeuvre personally. Looking just like an inflatable version of yourself they can also operate as detective distracting decoys.

That's not the only Lemmingsism you will no doubt have spotted. The core aim of the game is to indirectly influence a zombie-like sprite who walks endlessly back and forth with no apparent concern for his own safety. Without your intervention he isn't likely to die; the same can't be said for your chance of progressing, however.

Fail to inflate your navigation tweaking device bubbles fast enough and your master awakes causing Clouseau to spring into action and arrest you, though sometimes he'll spontaneously appear regardless. One way to repel his interference is to lay down a comedy cartoon black hole for him to stumble into, allowing you to continue your 'hard work' unimpeded - a phrase plucked straight from the German-translated manual.

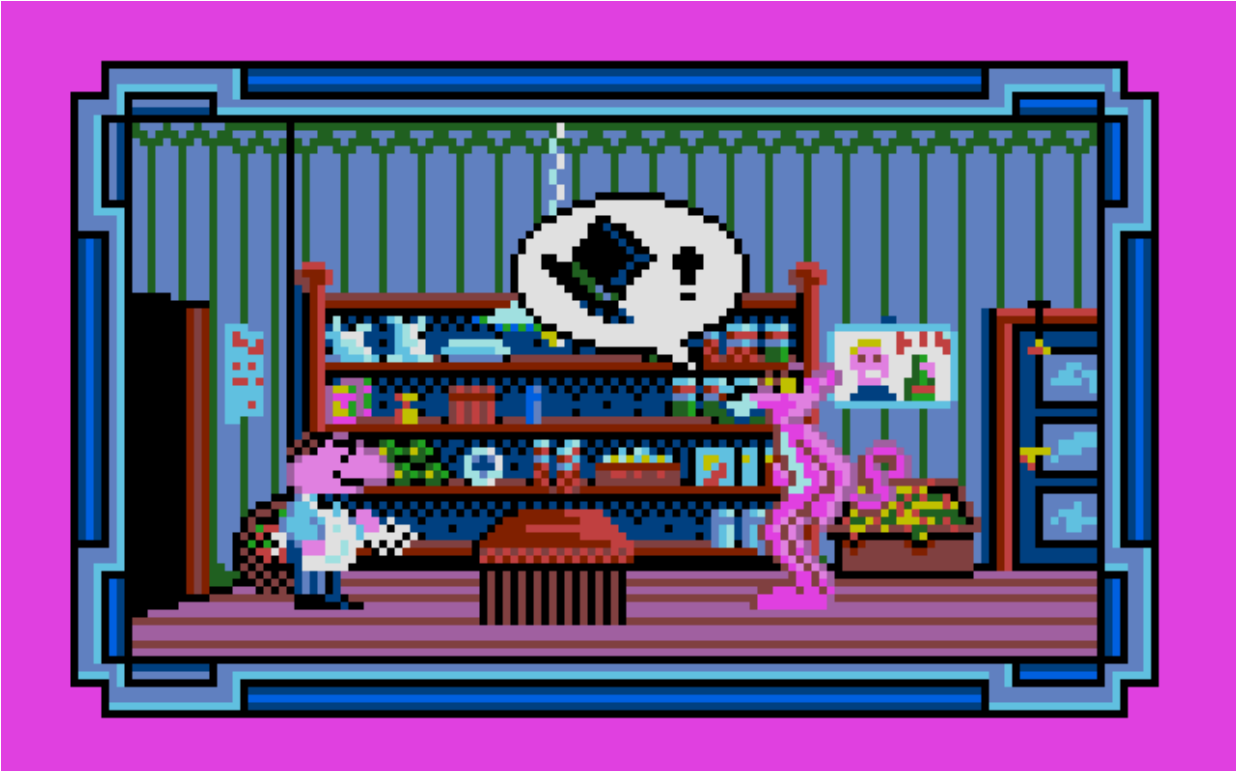
If all this is playing havoc with your déjà vu antenna, you're likely familiar with Ocean's Red Nose Day charity tie-in game, Sleepwalker, developed by CTA in 1993. It does make you wonder if they were Pink Panther fans, or were simply inspired by the mechanics.

A vague approximation of the Pink Panther theme tune serves as the title screen music, while in-game audio

succinctly captures the requisite creeping around in the shadows up to no good/detective on the case caper vibe.



An added adventure-esque dimension to the gameplay has been bolted on by way of the level selection screen, I suppose to flesh out what was to be a full price title. Here you enter the supermarket and silently converse with the shop assistant through the expression of icon-driven thought bubbles, which would certainly have helped reduce the localisation work required, whilst also allowing Pink to stay in character... mostly he pulls a 'Teller' in the source material.



As a poverty-stricken panther you take the lowliest job on offer from within the same menu, accrue moolah and invest it in adornments such as a top hat and car that to some would indicate your more privileged ancestry. This, in turn, makes you more eligible for employment, enabling you to work for wealthier clientele and swipe more extravagant loot, edging ever closer to that tropical getaway resort you've been dreaming of.

Each of the four levels terminate when you've coloured in the money bag found in the GUI, at which point you head back to the job centre to start afresh. Clearly the bumbling police theme turned out to be a godsend of a plot device!



The decor in each house differs slightly to reflect you've progressed to the next level, though the gameplay remains identical. For that reason, its brevity is unlikely to be a cause for complaint. If you can master the precision timing demanded, a competent player will complete the entire game in under half an hour, and probably never touch it again. Quite likely far less if you're playing the C64 version in which a showstopping (or very welcome) bug causes Mr Rich to get snagged on a piece of scenery and so kept safely out of harm's way.

Your reward is a static picture of Pink Panther sunbathing on a comically small island, sipping a Pina Colada, and living the high life on his ill-gotten gains. There's a lesson in that kids. I love edutainment games... part fun, part tutorial. Writing this from jail I *do* wonder if I should have read the instructions more thoroughly though.



What's bizarre is the excessive number of people who were involved in producing the title (thanks Hall of Light)...

Coder : Fabian Rosenschein

Coder : Holger Gehrmann

Coder : Holger P. Krekel

Coder : Oliver Hein

Coder : Stefan Schulz

Coder : Uwe Grabosch

Coder : Volker Marohn

Graphician : Bettina Wiedner

Graphician : Udo Graf

Musician : Fabian Rosenschein

Misc : Rolf Lakämper (Lakaemper)

I've seen triple-A blockbusters with a more svelte credits roster! What? Why? How? So many questions... and not all surrounding the game.

reLINE co-founder, 39-year-old Holger Gehrman, died on 11th February 2008 having fallen from the sixth or seventh floor of a skyscraper, or merely multi-storey building, depending on which report you believe. Google Translate has a lot to answer for. The impetus is thought to have been suicide rather than accidental death; tragic of course either way.



Olaf Patzenhauer, his erstwhile business partner, has now also passed away due to a heart attack sustained at the age of 50, though the exact date (sometime between 2011 and 2012) isn't commonly known.

Rest in peace. Long may your legacy live on in the ADF afterlife.

Perhaps not a sentiment with which the critics at the time would agree, at least with regards to Pink Panther, which received consistently low scores across the board...

ACE - 499/1000
CU Amiga - 6/10
The Games Machine - 39%
Your Amiga - 56%

What the reviewers tended to zoom in on is the poor, unresponsive control system, repetitive gameplay and extreme difficulty curve resulting from said finicky controls.

To say Crash's three reviewers despised the Spectrum port would be an understatement. Between them they concurred "this panther's rosy colour must surely be due to appearing in such an embarrassing tie-in!" and 'awarded' it an aggregated grade of 34%.

"The game looks horrible; the colour scheme is garish (pass the sun shades, vicar), and the rinky-dink pink himself looks little more than a small misshapen pussycat than a large mother of a Panther.

Control of the game is so difficult that it interferes with pilfering. All this adds up to a game interesting in concept but poorly implemented. My attention quickly turned elsewhere."



Still a long stretch from tickled pink, Amstrad Action weren't quite so disgusted with reLINE's offering...

"This one is just too difficult to get started with. Each game lasts a few seconds, and even when you know what you're doing it's a fairly tedious task. It's not a bad idea but instead of performing tasks using awkwardly selected icons (dreadfully translated instructions for them as well), they should have used a more easily selected system. Perhaps turning it into less of a "panic" task and more of an arcade adventure."



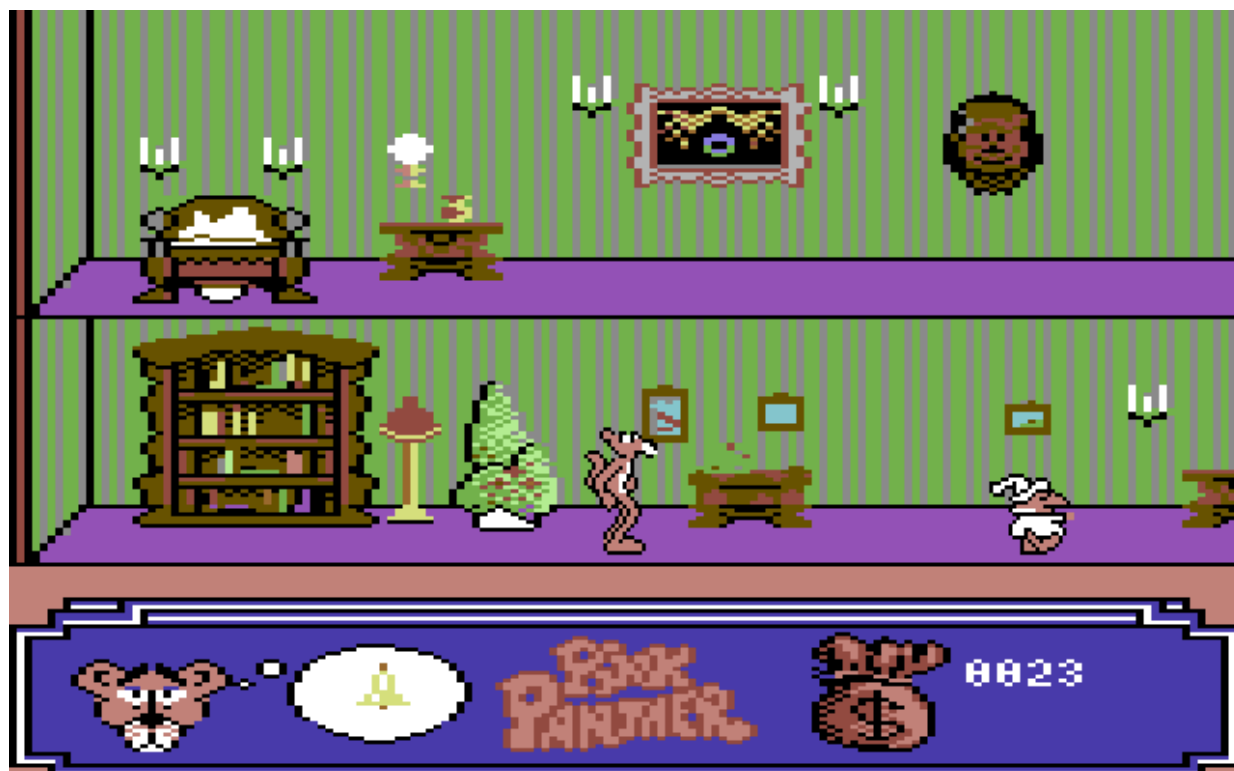
Their assessment of the CPC edition was capped with a 49% reckoning and the conciliatory remark, "Nice try at capturing the cartoon spirit, but the game fails to deliver."



Much like Crash, Zzap!64 were exceedingly aggrieved, this time by the very existence of the C64 port they deemed worthy of no more than a 14% bottom line. As decreed by game review law they formulated an explanation for their verdict and even put it into coherent sentences comprising words and letters for readers to consume with their eyeballs. A chunk of it looked like this...

"To be honest, the only interesting thing about Pink Panther is the coloured cassette shell! The game itself is tedious beyond belief, with long delays between turns, boring graphics, dirge-like music and frustrating gameplay: it looks like Gremlin have backed a right loser! The main sprite looks a bit like the Pink hero he's supposed to depict, but the rest of the graphics are awful, being poorly designed and gruesomely coloured. I don't know what the music programmer was on when he did the game theme but I don't think it was this planet.

But the gameplay, what about that? Well, 'frustratingly difficult' about sums it up, along with 'very boring'. Oh, by the way, it's cassette-multiload. Uuueergh!!!"



I suspect even if a vet had been on hand to issue a compassionate lethal injection, Zzap! would have considered it too kind a fate for our furry anti-hero. Their closing summary was by way of a rhetorical question: "Aren't gremlins supposed to cock things up? Well they've cocked this up!"

...the gremlins in question being the publisher in case that wasn't blindingly obvious. Gremlin aren't so fondly remembered for their licensed games, most of which fall into the Ocean/US Gold castoffs category. This one is sadly no exception.

In its defence, the graphics and animation are a well-executed homage to the cartoon source material, and no one

went blind producing it, not even *temporarily*. That's more than can be said for the first movie. For that reason alone Robert Wagner would have loved it I'm sure!